

THE EVENING STAR and DAILY NEWS
Washington, D. C., Friday, May 11, 1973

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GROOMED BY HELMS

Old CIA Hands Laud

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Earlier this week the Central Intelligence Agency, still somewhat demoralized by the bureaucratic house cleaning ordered by its new director, James R. Schlesinger, was shaken by disclosures that the agency had helped Water-gate conspirator E. Howard Hunt in an illegal domestic espionage mission.

Called to account in Congress, Schlesinger admitted the 1971 association with Hunt was "ill-advised" and promised such things would never happen again. And he strongly implied that his predecessor, Richard M. Helms, the career agent ousted from the CIA directorship early in President Nixon's second term, was partly to blame.

Today, with congressional hearings still pending, Helms' administration stands partly vindicated. With the sudden transfer of Schlesinger to the Pentagon, the new CIA director-designate turns out to be the very man Helms himself was quietly grooming as his successor: William E. Colby.

The announcement that Colby, a veteran agent who is the CIA's ranking expert on Vietnam, would step up to the directorship from his post as director of clandestine operations, drew uniform praise from old agency hands, "S professional" was the way one old hand summed it up. The consensus was that no more fitting a successor to Helms himself could have been found — despite the bureaucratic house-cleaning

Phoenix, with its highly publicized and exaggerated body counts of Vietcong killed by its South Vietnamese operatives, gained a widespread reputation as an organization of political assassination. This could inject controversy into Colby's confirmation hearings in the Senate.

BUT FOR CORDS operatives in the field, little of that sort of reputation has rubbed off on the slight, bespectacled and self-effacing Colby who created little lore, and even close associates had trouble thinking of an anecdote to illustrate his style.

The most characteristic one perhaps was related by Colby's former boss Komer:

Colby, on loan to the State Department from the CIA, was extremely reluctant to inherit Komer's colonial scale house in Saigon and chauffeur-driven car when he took over as chief deputy in the CORDS program in November 1968.

He even felt uneasy with the title ambassador, Komer recalls, and agreed to accept the title, house and car only when it was pointed out to him that the Vietnamese nominally running the program would think he was down-graded if the trappings of Komer's lifestyle were not maintained. "He still made one mistake," Komer recalled. "He didn't keep my Chinese cook."

HELMS, like Colby, stepped up to the CIA directorate from the director-

ship of clandestine operations.

Despite in-house elation at seeing an insider resume control at the CIA, informed observers feel that the main lines of the modernization Schlesinger began will remain — if only because Colby was virtually the only charter member of the old-line intelligence club to be promoted under Schlesinger's tenure.

"If he has the mandate to keep cutting down staff, he'll do it," one associate from Vietnam days predicted. "He has that ruthlessness."

UNDER Schlesinger, a staff cut back of five to ten percent of the agency's 15,000 employees was well underway, and during Schlesinger's first few weeks in office, a whole group of old-line professionals who had been close to Helms were fired.

The actual direction the Colby regime will take probably will not become known for many months. But a few surface indications could appear immediately if Colby decides in the name of professional tradition to undo some of the minute changes of style Schlesinger has ordered in his first few months as director.

Changing "plans" to "operations" was one. Another was even more symbolic: When you telephone the agency's central switchboard now, the operator no longer answers with a recital of the number you have just dialed. She says, "Central Intelligence." Such

HS/HC-228

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Colby Move

candor has been unheard of for the past ten years at least. Schlesinger had carried out in recent months.

Less reverently, Colby's coming could be described as the re-establishment of the "old-boy network" that has dominated the agency since its beginning in 1947 and which Schlesinger, for reasons of ideology as well as economy, had been instructed to dismantel.

A Yale graduate, a World War II alumnus of Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan's Office of Strategic Services who twice parachuted behind enemy lines, Colby, 53, is probably best known as an architect of the pacification program in Vietnam in the late 1960s.

DETACHED from the CIA to serve under the controversial Robert Komer in Vietnam right after TET 1968, Colby quickly made a name for himself as the rare official in that frustrating, endless war "who always listened to what you had to say and always followed through when he promised something," as a province adviser who served under him recalled yesterday.

The pacification program, or Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS), despite the controversy that surrounded its counter-insurgency offshoot program, Phoenix, was one of the few American operations in Vietnam whose participants occasionally believed they were accomplishing something.



—Associated Press

WILLIAM E. COLBY